



Water for Arizona Coalition

Priority Water Policy Initiatives, 2021

The Water for Arizona Coalition (WAC) works to ensure that water policies and programs support reliable, equitable, and clean water supplies for all people, flowing rivers and streams, and healthy, vibrant communities. The Coalition is focusing on three broad and interconnected water policy initiatives essential to the future of water supplies in the state.

Secure Groundwater for Rural Communities. Groundwater makes up about 40% of Arizona’s water supply. In much of “rural” Arizona—which comprises about 80% of the state’s footprint and where some 1.5 million people live—Arizona law essentially allows “open access” groundwater pumping. At least outside of sovereign tribal lands, there are few restrictions on how much groundwater can be withdrawn and used in these areas. Groundwater is the primary and often *only* water supply available to many rural communities, residents, and businesses, and is the source of year-round flow in most rivers, streams, and springs. The status quo approach to groundwater in rural Arizona is in essence “whoever drills the deepest well wins,” even if the pumping dries up neighboring wells, depletes nearby streams, or causes subsidence and fissures. It is time for the state to empower communities in rural Arizona with the choices, tools, and support they need to secure their water future according to their needs, vision, and local conditions.

Adapt Colorado River Management to Climate Change. Another 35-40% of Arizona’s water supply comes from the Colorado River. The amount of water taken out of the Colorado River and its reservoirs already greatly exceeds what flows into the river system, and climate change is significantly reducing flows. The 2007 Colorado River Operating Guidelines must be renegotiated by the seven Colorado River Basin states and the country of Mexico by 2026. The new guidelines will govern the releases of water from Lake Powell and Lake Mead for the entire river system and the 40 million people who depend on it in the United States and Mexico, including Native American nations. WAC participates on the Arizona Reconsultation Committee, which will guide Arizona’s efforts in the renegotiation process in the coming years. WAC will advocate for the committee to consider solutions that protect Colorado River supplies, resolve long-standing imbalances, and help determine how Arizona will manage and thrive as pressures on our water supplies increase. WAC believes the Colorado River’s new operating guidelines must incorporate realistic climate change projections, be protective of the habitat that relies on a flowing Colorado River, reflect a diverse set of values, and provide a basis for Arizona and the other Basin states, Native American nations, and Mexico to pursue water security and sustainability Basin-wide.

Protect Groundwater in Central Arizona: In the populous central part of the state where groundwater is already managed, it is important that existing protections remain in place and are strengthened, as the state transitions to a just, secure water future in the face of a new water reality. Management of groundwater in these areas under the 1980 Groundwater Management Act has enabled economic development and livability—we must ensure that central Arizona can continue to grow in a way that is sustainable. Stakeholder dialogue must honestly and transparently examine groundwater management issues in central Arizona. Such processes should advance constructive proposals to build on the 1980 Groundwater Management Act in ways that reflect the reality of reduced availability of Colorado River water and consider the public-interest need to ensure protection of limited, non-renewable groundwater reserves in the region.

The Water for Arizona Coalition is comprised of Arizonans who support policies and innovative practices to ensure a reliable water supply to meet the state’s needs. Collectively, we have over 60,000 Arizona members, as well as hundreds of hunter, angler, business, and outdoor recreation partners around the state. Learn more at: waterforarizona.com.

